Myths--Aetia or Animal Stories?

The relationship of the genres myth, aetia and animal stories

by Anna Birgitta Rooth (Uppsala)

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Myths—Aetia or Animal Stories?*

The relationship of the genres myth, aetia and animal stories

By Anna Birgitta Rooth (Uppsala)

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I

I shall illustrate the difficulty of determining the characteristics of different "genres" without including non-European material by refering to some of the material I recorded among the Athabascan Indians in Alaska.[1] The material is of primary importance not only for the function of genres such as "myth" and "aetia" or "aetiological stories" but also for an understanding of the narrator's *belief* in the aetiological stories and "myths".

The material recorded in Alaska is of great importance for the following problems discussed by scholars in folklore, ethnology and the history of religion:

(*a*) the structure of aetiological animal stories
(*b*) the importance of animal stories in given society
(*c*) the importance of animal stories in the process of enculturation
(*d*) the "religious" or mythological significance of animal stories in given society
(*e*) the definition of genres such as myths, animal tales and aetia
(*f*) the correlation of the structure of the European and North American Indian stories in these three genres

* Based upon a lecture given at the University of Zürich, May 6th, 1975.

[1] A. B. Rooth, *The Alaska Expedition 1966. Myths Customs and Belief among the Athabascan Indians and Eskimos of Northern Alaska* (*Acta Universitatis Lundensis. Sectio I Theologica, Juridica and Humaniora* 14). Lund 1971

(*g*) whether the terms "myth" and "aetia" are synonymous, as has been suggested by some scholars

In this short paper I shall restrict myself to commenting upon aetia and the notes on aetia put forward by T. T. Waterman, A. Pettitt and F. Boas.[1] Pettitt and Boas suggested that aetiological stories were meant for children.

In a work on the Storytelling of the Athabascan Indians[2] I arranged the aetiological material into three groups:

1. Explanatory stories (or elements)
2. Initial stories: "this-was-the-first-time" stories
3. Elucidatory[3] stories

The point must be raised whether the aetiological North American Indian animal stories recorded by me in Alaska differ in any way from other stories recorded in Europe and published in say, O. Dähnhardt's Natursagen.[4] In this connection it would be of interest to discuss the aetiological animal stories mentioned by Waterman. According to Waterman, these stories end with an aetiological explanation because the recorder has asked for explanatory traits. Thus, the problem is: Are the many North American Indian explanatory stories the result of *questioning* on the part of scholars, as Waterman suggests? I shall discuss this problem in the light of my experience from the fieldwork in Alaska.

[1] T. T. Waterman, *The explanatory Element in the Folk-tales of the North American Indians* (*The Journal of American Folklore* 27). Lancaster-New York 1914.
G. A. Pettitt, *Primitive Education in North America* (*University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 43). Berkely-Los Angeles 1946.
F. Boas, *Mythology and Folktales of the North American Indians* (*The Journal of American Folklore* 27). Lancaster-New York 1914.

[2] A. B. Rooth, *The Storytelling of the Athabascan Indians in Northern Alaska.* (Stencil) Lund 1970 (To be printed in *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Ethnologica Upsaliensia* with the title *The Importance of Storytelling*).

[3] Elucidatory corresponds to a term used by von Sydow in his lectures in the forties.

[4] O. Dähnardt, *Natursagen. Eine Sammlung Naturdeutender Sagen, Märchen, Fabeln und Legenden* 1–4. Leipzig-Berlin 1907–1912.

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The first question which may be asked is whether all aetiological animal stories are of the same kind. Is there any difference in, for example, form, content or function?

Form. In the storytelling of the Athabascan Indians it is possible to distinguish three groups of aetiological stories or episodes:

(1) those ending with an explanatory trait
(2) initial stories ("this-was-the-first-time" story) explaining how and when something happened or was made for the first time. As in (1) the explanation is explicit in the phrase "This was the first time".
(3) elucidatory stories.

In (1) and (2) it would not be possible for the listener/recorder to tell if a story or an episode was supposed to be an aetiological one were it not for the informant's explicit statement in the story (often at the end) that *this was how* the raven or crow got its colour, the caribou its long legs, and so on, or *this-was-the-first-time* the culture hero made a fishing spear or canoe or snowshoe.

The stories in group 3) are different from the others in that *the whole story is structured to elucidate* how the world was created, how the trickster or culture hero changed the primeval conditions into the present ones; how social institutions, taboos and rules were instituted—often by the Crow or Raven or some other culture hero.

Creation stories naturally belong to this group since their entire content describes the creation or the beginning of the world, mankind, social institutions, customs, artefacts, and so on. They do not have to depend narrowly upon the explicitly stated information—often rather loosely connected with the story—namely, that this is how the world was created or changed, for this—being the raison d'être of the entire story—is quite clear from the content.

Content. As mentioned above, the content of stories in (3) relates to the creation, alteration or commencement of something—a trait

in nature, a custom, a social institution, an artefact, and so on. In (1) and (2) the content itself would not necessarily reveal that the story or element is an aetiological one. That has more or less to be pointed out to an audience unfamiliar with the story. This explanation to the listener can, in a sense, be likened to the aside made by a character in a play or to comment provided by the Greek Chorus.

Function. Nothing can be inferred about the function of these stories from their form and content. The mimicry, gestures and tone of the informant and the reaction of the audience reveal the deeper meaning of the story. It is in the comments or ordinary speech following the story, or inserted as a parenthesis in it, and addressed to children or the uninitiated recorder, that this deeper meaning is communicated.

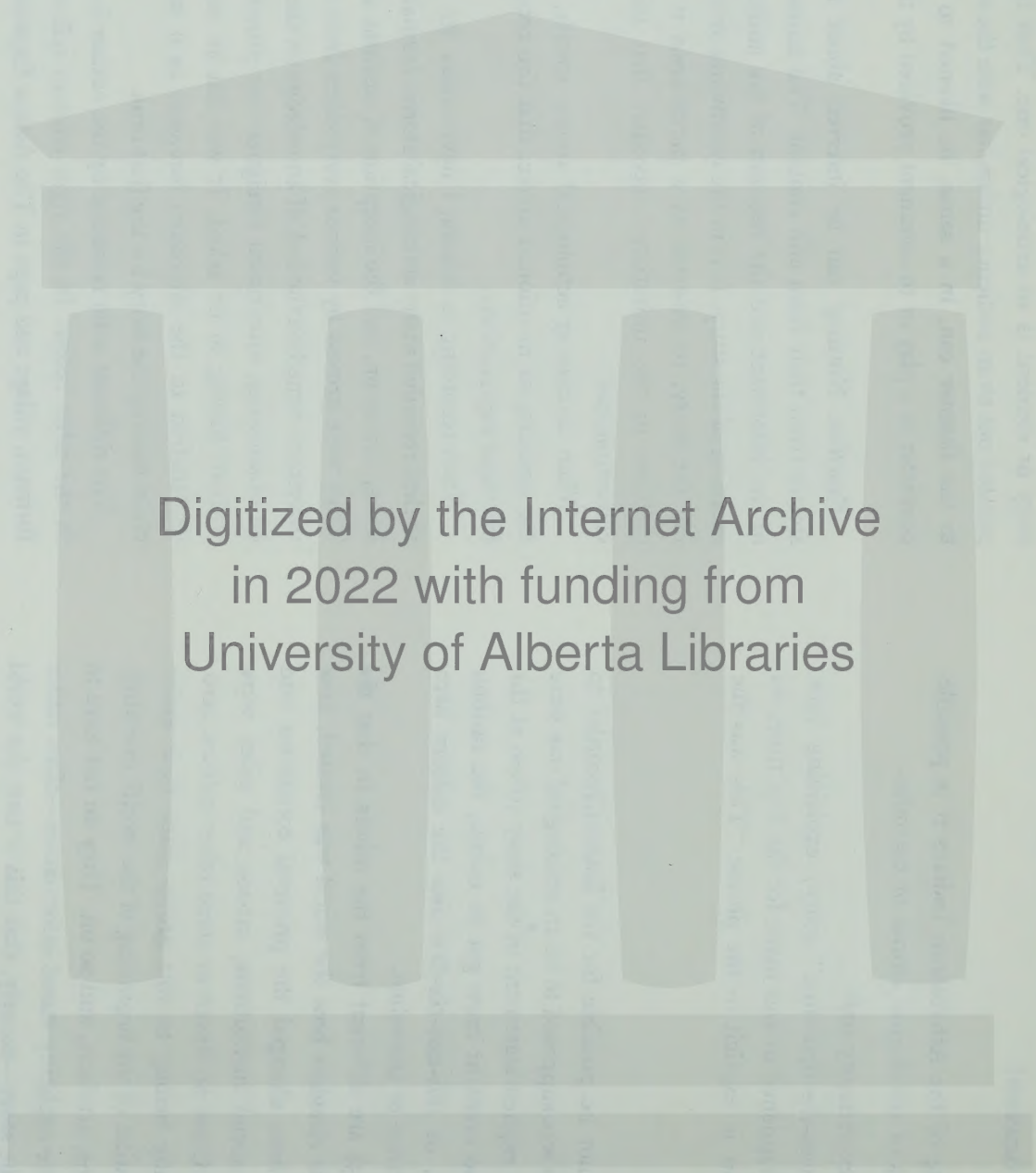
When discussing aetiological animal stories, Waterman expressed, the opinion, as mentioned above, that the recorder must have *asked* for these explanations.

When recording in Alaska, I never asked for explanations. I nevertheless recorded many aetiological stories (explaining animal characteristics, and so on, and the inception of customs and social institutions.) They were proved by various storytellers from different villages. The informant remedied the lack of knowledge on the part of the recorder—an unknowing, uninitiated foreigner—by providing a full explanation without having to be asked. It was felt as necessary to supply this explanation to the interested foreigner as it was to supply it to any child hearing the story for the first time.

The different aetia recorded by the author in Alaska, are presented in the table below. In the right column references are given to informant, village and page in The Alaska Expedition 1966.

Aetia

Animals	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Animals, dangerous	Now harmless	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 213
Animals, dangerous	Now harmless	Jimmy Charlie, Minto, p. 167



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https://archive.org/details/mythsaetiaoranim00root

Animals	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Animals, dangerous	Now harmless	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 305
Caribou	Long legs	George Woods, Kobuk, p. 17
Fox	Skinny	Maggie Isaac, Dot Lake, p. 233
Fox	Colour	Jones Richard, Selavik, p. 37
Fox	Right bait for	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 152, cf. p. 133
Lynx	Killing	Cf. Jimmy Charlie, Minto, p. 167
Lynx, bad	Now harmless	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 213
Rabbit	Scar in side	Charlie Steve, Eagle, p. 277
Wolverine	Steals	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 121
Wolverine	Steals	Jimmy Charlie, Minto, p. 163
Wolverine	Steals	Cf. Lucy Frank, Minto, p. 184
Wolverine	Steals	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 220
Wolverine	Steals	Martha Jackson, Copper Centre, p. 250
Wolverine	Steals	Charlie Steve, Eagle, p. 275
Shells	Origin from frogs	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 131
Sucker	Origin of bones in the tail	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 141
Men	Origin from fireweed and feathers	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 313
Men	Made of brush; why men die	Martha Jackson, Copper Centre, p. 343
Men (white)	Cause of baldness	Harry Frank, Northway, p. 325, p. 328, p. 252

Birds	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Birds	Colour	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 224 f.
Birds	Origin of names	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 225
Birds	Origin of names	Mary Titus, Minto, p. 226
Crow	Colour	Geraldina Charlie, Minto, p. 175
Crow	Colour	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 225
Crow	Colour	James Tobuk, Nome, p. 21
Crow	White spot at beak	Walter Northway, Northway, p 291
Crow	White spot at beak	Elisha Laman, Eagle, p. 279
Duck	Collar	Cf. Evelyn Alexander, Minto, p. 228
Eagle	Now harmless	Elisha Laman, Eagle, p. 284
Grouse (chicken)	Colour	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 134
Grouse	Colour	Rita Alexander, Minto, p. 174
Loon	Collar	Cf. Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 185
Loon	Collar	Cf. Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 137
Owl	Big eyes	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 151

Insects	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Ant	Waist	Moses Charlie Minto, p. 137
Ant	Waist	Jimmy Charlie, Minto, p. 162
Ant	Waist	Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 186

Trees and plants (or parts of them)	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Berries	Origin and names	Steve Northway, Northway, p. 338
Cones	Bent stem	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 147
Cones	Bent stem	Charlotte Titus, Minto, p. 202, 203
Cones	Bent stem	Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 189

Earth, heaven and heavenly bodies	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Earthquake	Caused by giant	Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 193
Earthquake	Caused by giant	Cf. Frank Sam, Northway, p. 304
Mountain	Ice	Joe Joseph, Tanacross, p. 247
Stones	Tracks in stones	Lucy Frank, Minto, p. 183
Volcanos	Ice and fire	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 298
Moon	Spots in moon	Hamuschka Zachar, Nondalton, p. 93 f
Moon	Spots in moon	Charlie Steve, Eagle, p. 270
Moon	Spots in moon (boy)	Bella Biedermann, Eagle, p. 257
Moon	Spots in moon	Elisha Laman, Eagle, p. 279
Moon	Spots in moon (crow)	David Paul, Tanacross, p. 241
Moon (and sun)	Sealed to heaven with saliva	Doris Charlie, Dot Lake, p. 238
Moon	Sealed to heaven with saliva	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 307
Moon	Sealed to heaven with saliva	Catherine Trefont, Nondalton, p. 82
Moon (and sun)	Setting its course	Doris Charlie, Dot Lake, p. 238
Moon (and sun)	Setting its course	Martha Jackson, Copper Centre, p. 344
Moon (and sun)	Setting its course	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 307
Moon (and sun)	Setting its course	Catherine Trefont, Nondalton, p. 82
Sky (low)	Now high up	David Paul, Tanacross, p. 241
Sky (low)	Now high up	Harry Frank, Northway, p. 325
Sky (low)	Now high up	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 307
Sky (low)	Now high up	Martha Jackson, Copper Centre, p. 353
Big Dipper	Constellation	Hamuschka Zachar, Nondalton, p. 91 f.
Big Dipper	Constellation	Bella Biedermann, Eagle, p. 265
Big Dipper	Constellation	Alexej Evan, Nondalton, p. 73
Orion	Origin of	Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 186

Social institutions and customs	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Magic songs	Origin of	Cf. Goulia Delkittie, Nondalton, p. 61

Social institutions and customs	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Magic songs	Origin of	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 148
Magic songs	Origin of	Cf. Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 138 f, p. 140
Magic songs	Origin of	Alexej Evan, Nondalton, p. 63 ff.
Magic songs	Origin of	Cf. Frank Sam, Northway, p. 302
Moieties	Origin of	Charlotte Titus, Minto, p. 209
Potlatch	Origin of	Charlotte Titus, Minto, p. 207
Prayer to crow	Origin of	Bassie Charlie, Minto, p. 159
Snowshoe game	Origin of	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 144 f.
Snowshoe game	Origin of	Jimmy Charlie, Minto, p. 166

Artefacts	*Characteristics*	*Informants*
Canoe (form)	Idea from bone	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 143
Canoe (form)	Idea from bone	Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 187
Canoe (form)	Idea from bone	Lucy Frank, Minto, p. 181
Canoe (form)	Idea from bone	Walter Tirus, Minto, p. 216 f.
Canoe (form)	Idea from bone	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 301
Canoe (material	Test of	Lucy Frank, Minto, p. 181 f.
Canoe (material)	Test of	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 301
Canoe (material)	Test of	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 143
Canoe (material)	Test of	Chief Peter John, Minto, p. 187 f.
Canoe (well sewn)	Test of	Walter Titus, Minto, p. 216 f.
Fire-drill	Origin (Noah)	Cf. Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 146
Point of fishspear	Origin (Noah)	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 125
Raft	First time	Charlie Steve, Eagle, p. 276
Snowshoe	Idea from bone	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 301
Snowshoe	Idea from bone	Frank Sam, Northway, p. 310
Snowshoe	Idea from bone	Moses Charlie, Minto, p. 143
Snowshoe	Idea from stomach of moose	Martha Jackson, Copper Centre, p. 350

As a result of my experience in Alaska, I am tempted to believe that many more stories might have had a deeper meaning. This, however, is lost if the informant's alertness wanes, leading him to overlook the recorder's role as a listener-novice.

When recording, I was struck by the informant's insistence on giving explanations because it indicated the importance attached to the story and thus its *significance* for the informant's society and culture. If we analyze the animal stories of the Alaskan Indians, we find that their structure seems to resemble that of their European counterparts.

Their assertion—often appearing as a parenthesis or offered by way of introduction to the recorder—that in ancient times men were animals or vice versa corresponds to a sentence often featured in European stories—"in those days when animals could talk ...". It refers to some kind of prehuman age when animals actually were—or acted as—men, while still retaining their animal characteristics, often of importance in the story.

The most important difference between the European animal stories and the North American Indian ones lies in the credence given to the latter. The older of my informants regarded the animal stories as a kind of prehistory or mythological ethnohistory, according them the same intensity of belief that some orthodox Christians accord the Bible, holding it to be God's word, and thus not in any way to be doubted. Indians in contact with modern society may, today, partially or wholly disbelieve the stories just as secularized Christians may partially or wholly reject the Bible.

The stories still had a special significance and value for the older Indians. Although missionaries had been working for over a hundred years in Alaska, some of my informants could remember the time when they first saw a white man. This means that they and their contemporaries in these isolated villages were reared in indigenous Indian concepts and not in Christian religious ideas. Hence their testimonies are of importance in cross-cultural comparisons when it comes to defining aetia and myth. My older informants believed in the stories related and in the traditional subjects inherent in such genres as myth and aetia—that is, the same genres as are found in Europe but where they command no credence today.

To most scholars one of the distinguishing criteria of myth is that it has to be believed in by the members of the society to which it pertains even if it is not identical with any of the cult myths which explained or mirrored some particular cult and its rites. Many scholars consider that the myth reflects a cult or ritual pattern. Where no description of such a cult or ritual pattern exists, some scholars have remedied the lack by fabricating cults and rites from, for example,

the "myth texts"[1] they presume may be present in Old Norse Sources. But I have no intention of discussing here the cult myth of which we also have examples from North American Indians.

When discussing the genre myth, we have to remember that many scholars have considered myths as first and foremost identical with explanatory stories.[2] This has led me to deal with the explanatory animal stories recorded in Alaska. In part II I offer a discussion of aetiological animal stories.

II

An excellent compilation of aetiological stories from South America was published by Lehmann-Nitsche[3] during the period 1922–1939 (by then posthumously). As L. Röhrich[4] points out, the task of collating the aetia of the South American continent was a major undertaking.

Lehmann-Nitsche refers to one of the oldest known aetiological stories in the epic of Gilgamesh where Ishtoar turns her lover into a bird with broken wings. This bird "kappi", evidently an onomatopoeic name, cries "kappi", my wing.

This type is partly aetiological. The effect or function of the story is to confer meaning of a sound, allowing it to be associated with words in the language. Thus, in the Latin Christian tradiation, the cock crows "Christus natus est!" (Christ is born). The raven croaks "Cras! Cras!" (tomorrow! tomorrow!) referring—according to St Augustine—to the heathen reluctant to be baptized and to repent postponing his decision until the next day.[5]

In the Swedish tradition we have similar attempts at imitating the

[1] A. B. Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology*, p. 106 (*Acta Reg. Societatis Humaniorum Litter. Lundens. Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund* LXI). Lund 1961.

[2] Cf. A. B. Rooth, *Folklig diktning. Form och Teknik* p. 174. Uppsala 1965.

[3] Lehmann-Nitsche *Studien zur Südamerikanischen Mythologie. Die Ätiologischen Motive*. Hamburg 1939.

[4] L. Röhrich, *Märchen und Wirklichkeit*. Wiesbaden 1974.

[5] A. B. Rooth, *The Raven and the Carcass. An Investigation of a Motif in the Deluge Myth in Europe, Asia and North America* (*Folklore Fellows Communications* n:o 186). Helsinki 1962.

sound of wheels—be it of a horsecar or a modern train.[1] Church bells toll whether a rich man or a poor man has died. For the rich man they say: "Far åt himla! Far åt himla!" (Go to heaven! Go to heaven!) and for the poor: "Ryk åt helvet, ryk åt helvet!" (Go to hell, go to hell!)

The onomatopoeia is used by the Swedish proletarian author Ivar Lo-Johansson with the explanatory comment that bell ringers, being poorly paid, were in a hurry to get through with the tolling. To the priest, about whom Ivar Lo-Johansson writes, this was an example of the burlesque humour of vulgar people.[2] But it also expressed the people's sense of social unjustice. The sound of the bells of the big farms or manors were invested with a meaning referring to the meanness of the master towards his underlings: "Blå välling och sur sill: Blå välling och sur sill!" (Watery gruel and sour herring! Watery gruel and sour herring!)[3]

Practically all sounds made by animals (especially birds) and objects can be the object of an onomatopoeic transcription. Very often no explanation is given why the animal or object is made to say its words or piece of verse. This genre is what we call "härm" (vocal imitation) in Sweden. This genre hardly offers an explanation in the same sense as "aetia" or the French "les pourquois".

In the aetiological stories we have the answers to the questions Why and How, but as mentioned, this is not so in the case of the imitation genre. Only where some *verbal explanation* of the sound is supplied is it possible to accept the story as aetiological. Even here an absolute division into the genres "härm" and aetiological stories is difficult to uphold. Aetia can be epical stories or they can be presented in the form of "dit", to use von Sydow's term. Again, it is difficult to state if and when in these types of stories and statements an existing belief is involved.

[1] A. B. Rooth, *Folklig diktning* p. 166. Uppsala 1965.

[2] I. Lo-Johansson, *Statarliv* p. 80–81. Stockholm 1941.

[3] M. Rehnberg, *Blå välling och sur sill. Vällingklockor och vällingklocksramsor*. Nordiska Museet. Arlöv 1967.

The birds' cries and the frog's croaking are penetrating sounds. But even the howling of the fox and wolf can be penetrating and might conceivably have been interpreted. This however is not the case in the material I have seen. The noises of other wild mammals are often limited to a short oestrus period, not being heard throughout the year like the birds' cries. But even so, considering the earlier importance of the mammals, it is astonishing that "härm" (Tierstimmendeutungen) were not connected with mammals, only with birds. This might suggest that we have here a cultural tradition or a cultural pattern for "Tierstimmendeutungen".

Lehmann-Nitsche gives us examples of these imitations ("Tierstimmendeutungen") i.e. types of short stories or anecdotes explaining the bird's special cry. Thus, for example, a man is turned into a bird for some crime or misdeed, and cries words referring to his crime.

With one exception (the hog), the sounds or cries of mammals are not represented in Lehmann-Nitsche's collection although he has many examples of aetiological stories about mammals.

It seems that the interpretation of cries relates solely to birds. A check of Lehmann-Nitsche's collection gives us 54 examples. Only *one* other animal, an amphibian—the frog or toad—has had its cries interpreted.

One point of interest is L-N's statement in the introduction, namely that he was not convinced by Koch-Grünberg's reasons and arguments when presenting an aetiological story. It is an important statement—because the presentation of observations made by field workers so as to convince the reader is a difficult task.

I myself was unable to appreciate the statement made by Malinowski (see below) on the importance attached to myths by the Trobrianders. This depends upon the difficulty of describing the place and role of the aetiological story (or myth) in the existential dimension when the informants are delivering these stories. It was not until I had experienced the importance of the aetiological stories indicated by my Alaskan informants that I understood fully what Malinowski must have experienced and tried to communicate.

The importance, or deeper meaning, is communicated in the comment often interspersed in the story or appended to it. The comments are often accentuated by the informant's behaviour, gesture, mimicry and emotional expressions.

A feature common to all students of the genre of aetiological stories and its relation to myths is that the material on which they founded their analysis was collected at a time when discussions of genres, of the contextual (or preferably existential) situation and of social function were not really regarded as fundamental problems. The recorded stories were transferred into printed text, very seldom with notes or observations referring to the existential situation (Sitz im Leben). The corpus or the stories themselves were enough.

That is why folklorists so often have had to study only the delivered texts—because no other information existed. Another important factor is that stories as "texts" were closely linked to the study of language: they were not stories with a certain function in social life, enculturation and so on. Scholars who reproach students of folktales or *chimerates* for not putting them into an existential and social setting are either ignorant or malicious.

There is no reason to blame the early fieldworkers for not recording the additional data. Scholarship and theoretical discussion had not reached the point where the need for such information had become lamentably clear. We can only hope that modern scholars in Canada and USA will leave their libraries and desks in order to collect what little is left in small communities where acculturation has not yet gone too far.

In the chapter "Die ätiologische Erzählung" in "Märchen und Wirklichkeit" Lutz Röhrich distinguishes between folklorists and ethnologists.[1] In Swedish terminology both these terms have a long and intermingled history, ending up today by being synonymous. Röhrich refers to what we in Sweden would call ethnographers (=Völkerkundler) and folklorists, the latter often studying only European or Eurasian verbal material.

[1] Lehmann-Nitsche, *op. cit.* p. 113.

"Folklorist" also has various meanings in different scholary traditions, but this is here beside the point. It is, however, precisely in connection with the study of aetiological stories and their relation to the term "myths" that the scholar of necessity must look for material outside Europe. It gives Röhrich reason to point out the folklorists' neglect of non-European material. (This too has its explanation in cases where folklore has been combined with English, German, Old Norse and other philological and literary studies at European and American universities.)

I have referred above to the necessity of studying non-European material when discussing the term "myth". This term has been so misused and has so many definitions that I frequently enclose it in quotation marks, hoping one day to discuss this term and its many possible meanings in a special paper or book.

The first to record myth in a modern way was Malinowski. When I read Malinowski's works some decades ago I was, as stated above, not convinced and I could not understand how he could be so sure of the meaning of the stories and their function in social life. This is partly explained by the fact that Malinowski, trying to see the story in its existential/social setting did not stop there but went further. He tried to explain the stories and myths as phenomena with roots in the basic social life of the Trobriand Islands. The "myth" and story had its origin and explanation in the given social settings: customs, beliefs, nature. This argument of Malinowski's led to Stith Thompson's remark that Malinowski was very provincial.

This urge—or what I conceived as an urge—to explain the story in its ecological or social setting was not comprehensible to me from my own experience of the genetic tradition and distribution of the same types of myths and stories in, for example, the North American continent.

The real importance of Malinowski's work must have been in his *realisation of the importance* of the myths and stories in Trobriand society. But these extremely interesting observations were not presented as such but used as an *explanation for the origin* of the myth in its local setting.

If Malinowski had only pointed to the importance of myth in society without trying to explain *how* it originated in this society, all would have been well.

It was not until I had the opportunity of recording stories among the Indians in Alaska that I faced a situation similar to Malinowski's. I had had years of experience of recording in Sweden. But the Alaskan experience was different because of the deeper social and religious meaning of the myths and stories. It was not so much a matter of the stories themselves—their content, form and function—as of the dignity and seriousness expressed in voice, mimicry and gesture by the informants among the older Indians. This was a new dimension. It was a problem which had to do with the communication process of transferring a synchronic perception into a diachronic description: the recorder's perception of the informant's behaviour in recounting, in conversing and in his or her philosophy or world view expressed in these hours of recording, followed by the exasperating and rather frustrating attempt to convert this holistic, synchronic perception into a chronological verbalization.[1]

I have drawn attention to the difficulties of using genres such as myth, aetia and animal stories if we restrict ourselves to European material for our definition or determination of the different genres. If we want "belief" as a necessary and integrated part of "myth", we must remember that *belief* has a tendency to change or disappear although the story itself can survive. I think of explanatory stories about giants, for example. Saxo, the learned author of the Gesta Danorum (late 12th century), holds the monoliths to be the result of the work of giants, thus proving the existence of giants in primeval times.

Some of the stories about giants are joculates and were not necessarily believed in as a story even though belief in giants existed. In the same way some stories about the Raven trickster are joculates and not necessarily believed in.

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[1] A. B. Rooth, *On the difficulty of transcribing synchronic perception into chronological verbalization.* Etnologiska institutionen, Uppsala Universitet Meddelanden nr 4 1974, to be printed in *Religion and Reason.*

However, there is belief in Raven as a trickster and culture hero. This is attested by the evidence of many other stories, beliefs, rites, and sacrifices concerning the Raven. My purpose in writing this was to show how necessary it is to know more about "myths", "aetia" and animal stories among the North American Indians in order to compare them with European and/or African material.

Very few modern fieldworkers, as mentioned above, have studied the "myth" in a primitive society. For several decades scholars have discussed genres with the knowledge that we lack the capacity to comment on the situation and do not know the precise function of genres such as legends, myths, aetiological stories etc. Rethinking is urgently needed for some genres and demands new fieldwork. For such genres labelled as myth, animal stories and aetia we need material from non-European societies which have not yet been too acculturated by European/American culture.

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